

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT/PROJECT COORDINATION

To ensure that the community has had ample opportunity to provide comments and be involved in the development of the preferred alternative, this study has included public involvement consisting of public scoping and information meetings, question and answer sessions, newsletters, newspaper advertisements, and a project web site.

Public involvement for the proposed US 93 improvements was conducted concurrently with the proposed ultimate bypass around Wickenburg and the Wickenburg Interim Improvement Project. For clarity, only the comments germane to the US 93, Wickenburg to the Santa Maria River study are included in this DEA.

Scoping

The purpose of the scoping process is to identify potential issues, concerns, and opportunities (ICOs) that should be considered in the development and evaluation of alternatives for the proposed improvements. ICO information was obtained from area residents, business owners, and government agency representatives through public and agency scoping meetings. ADOT's technical staff also provided ICO input to the study. The scoping process for this project is summarized in the project scoping report.

Agency Scoping

An agency scoping meeting was held on June 3, 1999, from 1:00 to 3:00 pm at the Wickenburg Council Chambers, located at 155 North Tegner Street in Wickenburg. The meeting was attended by representatives of the BLM, ADOT, ASLD, Town of Wickenburg, Yavapai County, FHWA, and the Wickenburg Chamber of Commerce. The meeting was opened with a discussion of the study corridor, the purpose of the study, and the purpose of the agency scoping meeting. After reviewing the meeting handout, the floor was opened to the agency representatives to express their concerns regarding the development and evaluation of alternatives for the proposed highway improvements. The agency representatives voiced the ICOs listed below regarding the roadway's design, social and economic impacts, and environmental impacts. Copies of correspondence submitted to and received from various agencies following the scoping meeting are included in Appendix J.

Design Considerations

- Incorporate design measures to preserve the visual character of the scenic highway.
- Coordinate with Western Area Power Administration regarding potential conflicts with power lines that cross the existing roadway near the Santa Maria River.
- Concern was expressed regarding potential material source sites and staging areas.
- Access to public lands and recreational areas must be maintained.
- Access control should be addressed early in the process.

Social and Economic Impacts

- Disruption of hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian trails should be avoided.

- Consistency with general land use plans should be considered.
- Physical improvements on ASLD lands (e.g. corrals, barns, etc.) would require compensation if they were affected by the highway improvements.
- Minimize impacts on residential areas.
- Two grazing allotments (the Santa Maria and the DG Ranch) are present on BLM lands south of the Santa Maria River. These land parcels are designated for retention.
- Subsurface federal mining rights on ASLD lands need to be considered.
- Assistance for grazing lessees, such as providing fencing during construction, should be considered.
- Concerned about impacts on BLM recreational lands and the potential involvement of Section 4(f) considerations in the study.
- Maintain access to grazing allotments on ASLD lands.
- Keep the cost of the proposed highway in a reasonable range.

Environmental Impacts

- Concerned about visual impacts on designated scenic highway. The roadway should blend into the surrounding areas.
- Wildlife crossing locations need to be identified and accommodated in developing design alternatives.
- Bat surveys at existing structures on BLM land would be required to detect roosting areas and determine the need for mitigation.
- Consider plant salvaging during design.
- Minimize air quality impacts and noise pollution.
- Minimize impacts on wildlife habitat.

Public Scoping

A public scoping meeting was held on June 3, 1999, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at the Wickenburg Community Center, located at 160 North Valentine Street in Wickenburg. The meeting was advertised in the *Wickenburg Sun* and the *Arizona Republic* two weeks prior to the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information about the study process to the general public and to provide an opportunity to gather public input on ICOs for the proposed highway improvements. One hundred seventy-two people signed the attendance sheets for the meeting. A summary of comments received following the public scoping meeting regarding improvements to US 93 from Wickenburg to the Santa Maria River is provided below.

Design Considerations

- Use the existing alignment for new four-lane divided roadway north of Wickenburg.
- Maintain access to local roads.
- Improve the roadway's safety and traffic flow.

Social and Economic Impacts

- Minimize impacts on private property.

- Avoid residential areas and neighborhoods.
- Protect existing recreational areas and equestrian trails.
- Minimize the cost of building the new roadway.

Environmental Impacts

- Avoid impacts on air quality.
- Minimize visual impacts.
- Avoid wildlife and habitat impacts.
- Minimize noise impacts in residential areas.
- Preserve local water quality.
- Avoid floodplain encroachment.

Information Meetings

A public information meeting was held at the Wickenburg Community Center from 6:00 to 8:00 pm on August 22, 2000. The meeting was advertised in the *Wickenburg Sun* and the *Arizona Republic* two weeks prior to the meeting. Three hundred forty-three people signed the attendance sheets for the meeting. The meeting began with an explanation of the study process and how it had progressed since the public scoping meeting held on June 3, 1999. The alternatives for widening US 93 from SR 89 to the Santa Maria River were presented along with information about the other portions of the larger US 93 study from SR 74 to the Santa Maria River. It was explained that the existing roadway would be retained for one direction of travel and widening would occur to either side to provide a four-lane divided facility. Forms were made available at the meeting to allow the public to submit written comments.

Comments received regarding the project were generally in support of improving the roadway due to perceived unsafe conditions on the existing roadway. Concerns were expressed about visual impacts, impacts to businesses, avoiding wildlife and vegetation, improving the US 93/SR 89 and US 93/SR 71 junctions, accommodating new development, noise impacts, and maintaining access to adjacent properties. In addition, several people expressed opposition to the widening because they believed that the bypass around Wickenburg should be the first priority for US 93 improvements in the Wickenburg vicinity.

Hearing

A public hearing for the preferred alternative is planned for November 17, 2004, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm in the cafeteria of the Wickenburg High School, located at 1090 South Vulture Mine Road. A transcript of the public hearing would be included in the final environmental document. In addition, a summary of public comments received following distribution of this DEA and during the public hearing comment period, as well as ADOT responses, would be provided in the final environmental document. After review of the final study documents, FHWA would issue a final decision on the proposed project.

Other Ongoing Activities

Public involvement has also been achieved during the course of the study through the use of study updates and a project web site. Study update newsletters were included in the *Wickenburg Sun* in May 1999, February 2000, October 2000, and March 2002. A project web site offering study information has been available during the course of the study for public information and feedback. The web site address is <http://www.wickenburg.civilnet.sverdrup.com>.